



Mysterium Esse Christi: Thomas Aquinas & the Supernatural Being of Jesus Christ

Eric A. Mabry 

Abstract

For over 700 years scholastic theologians of varying degrees of allegiance to the text(s) of Thomas Aquinas have discoursed on the mystery of Christ's being (*esse*): Did Christ have one or two acts of existence? Yet despite this frequent and recurring *quaestio*, nevertheless only a handful of scholastic commentators pause to note that this is not simply a debate between rival scholastic 'schools' in regard to a theological mystery, but that in fact there is an inconsistency within the Angelic doctor's own texts. And while in more recent scholarship this discrepancy has not only been noticed but explicated in various ways, nevertheless it is the contention of this paper that a satisfactory exposition of the meaning of *esse secundarium* has not yet been achieved. Consequently, I propose in this paper that *esse secundarium* is the created, substantial, but absolutely supernatural participation of the human nature of Jesus in the uncreated communication of the divine *esse* of the Word and provide a robust textual defense of this interpretation.

Keywords

Theology, Thomas Aquinas, Christology, Incarnation, Hypostatic Union, Being of Christ, *esse secundarium*

Prooemium

The great Jesuit metaphysician, Erich Przywara, observed that 'the mystery of the supernatural incarnation reaches its critical climax in the question concerning the being of Christ...'.¹ For over 700 years scholastic theologians of varying degrees of allegiance to the text(s) of Thomas Aquinas have discoursed on the mystery of Christ's being (*esse*): Did Christ have one or two acts of existence? Yet despite this

¹ Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics—Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John Betz & D.B. Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 1.1.7: 304.

frequent and recurring *quaestio*, nevertheless only a handful of commentators pause to note that this is not simply a debate between rival scholastic ‘schools’ in regard to a theological mystery, but that in fact there is an inconsistency within the Angelic doctor’s own texts.

Method

I have elsewhere distilled six possible interpretative positions which may be advanced regarding the meaning of *esse secundarium* in relation to the apparent discrepancy among Thomas’ texts.² In the same place, I also provided a textual exposition of the *QD de Unione*. And while I indicated the textual complementarity between the *QD de Unione* and other significant Christological texts such as the *Summa Theologiae* and the *Quodlibetal Questions*, nevertheless, there was insufficient space to advance a sustained or systematic exposition of Thomas’ Christological principles which had led me to my interpretation of *esse secundarium*.

In this article, therefore, I wish to again affirm my principal textual thesis, namely that *esse secundarium* is the created, substantial, but absolutely supernatural participation of the human nature of Jesus in the uncreated communication of the divine *esse* of the Word. But I also intend to explicate and advance a significant theological implication. If my textual interpretation of Thomas’ Christological hypothesis is correct, then it suggests that the notion of *esse secundarium* expresses the supernatural, substantial participation of Jesus’s humanity in the divine *esse* of the Word metaphysically, but other facets of the same supernatural reality may be expressed dogmatically by the term ‘hypostatic union’ and systematically by the term ‘grace of union’. Hence, the terms *esse secundarium*, hypostatic union, and *gratia unionis* overlap in their connotation while remaining distinct in their denotation.

I begin with a brief clarification of my terms and an extrapolation of foundational Thomistic principles. I will then provide a brief sketch of how I judge both the ‘standard’ single-*esse* Thomistic view and the non-Thomistic double-*esse* view to fail to account for some of these principles. I will then offer a series of exegetically-based arguments to illustrate how I arrived at my textual thesis and its theological implication. Once, I have completed this primary sequence of constructive work, I turn to address a series of common *dubia*. Finally, I offer a brief application of Thomas’ missiology.

² Eric A. Mabry, ‘The Hypothesis of *Esse Secundarium*: Positions and Interpretation’, *The Lonergan Review* 12 (2021): 79-102.

Terms & Principles

As for the terms of my textual thesis, I understand by ‘created’, everything which has a finite beginning. By ‘substantial’, I intend to denote that which pertains to the order of substance (i.e., non-accidental) because the union of humanity and divinity in the Person of the Word did not occur according to accident but according to substance,³ and the grace of personal union is not accidental but substantial.⁴ ‘Supernatural’ designates any entitative disproportion between one nature and another.⁵ I use the term ‘absolutely’, however, to distinguish those supernatural *res vel facta* which are disproportionate in every way, to any nature, and to any order.⁶ I define ‘participation’ as a relation of dependent alterity which consists in the proportion of similarity and difference between a principle and that which originates from the principle and according to which that which originates really depends upon its principle or origin for what makes it similar to the origin.

When speaking of the assumption of human nature by the Word, Thomas is clear that it is a concrete,⁷ individual,⁸ body-soul composite.⁹ Consequently, when I refer to the ‘human nature of Jesus’, I mean by ‘human nature’, the individuated body-soul composite which is uniquely his.¹⁰ By the name ‘Jesus’, I profess with the first four ecumenical councils the *Incarinate* Word of the Father. God alone is uncreated. And since God is his own essence,¹¹ I intend by the term ‘uncreated’ that which is ontologically identical with the divine essence. If God is good, then he is his own goodness; indeed, he is goodness itself.¹² But as the essence of goodness is to share itself,¹³ it follows that

³ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 6, ad 3 (ed. Leonina, 11: 37b).

⁴ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 6, a. 6, ad 2 (ed. Leonina, 11: 104b).

⁵ See Bernard Lonergan, *De Ente Supernaturali*, in *Early Latin Theology*, vol. 19 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, trans. Michael Shields, ed. Robert Doran & Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), thesis 2: 80.

⁶ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 7, a. 13, ad 3: ‘Gratia autem unionis non est in genere gratiae habitualis: sed est super omne genus, sicut et ipsa divina persona’ (ed. Leonina, 11: 125b). On the relatively v. absolutely supernatural distinction, see Lonergan, *De Ente Supernaturali*, thesis 2: 80 and ‘Mission and the Spirit’, in *A Third Collection*, vol. 16 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert Doran and John Dadosky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 25.

⁷ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 5, ad 2 (ed. Leonina, 11: 35a); q. 4, a. 2, ad 1 (11: 74b); q. 4, a. 3, ad 2 (11: 81b); q. 4, a. 4, ad 3 (11: 83b); q. 17, a. 1c (11: 219a).

⁸ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, ad 3 (ed. Leonina, 11: 25b); *Scriptum in 3 Sent.*, d. 2, q. 1, a. 2, sol. 1, n. 39 (ed. Moos, 3: 39); d. 6, q. 1, a. 1, sol. 3, ad 2 et ad s.c., nn. 34 & 36 (3: 228); d. 10, q. 1, a. 2, sol. 2, n. 53 (3: 338).

⁹ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 5c (ed. Leonina, 11: 34a).

¹⁰ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 17, a. 1c (ed. Leonina, 11: 220a).

¹¹ Thomas, *SCG* 1.21 (ed. Leonina, 13: 63-64); *ST Ia*, q. 3, a. 3c (ed. Leonina, 4: 39b).

¹² Thomas, *SCG* 1.38 (ed. Leonina, 13: 113).

¹³ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 1, a. 1c (ed. Leonina, 11: 6b).

in his free divine plan (Eph 1:10) to send the Son in the fullness of time (Gal 4:4) that he willed his goodness to be communicated in a special way to rational creatures.¹⁴ Thus, by ‘uncreated communication’ I wish to denote the self-diffusion of divine goodness.¹⁵

The divine *esse* is the eternal, immutable, simple, one, and pure act of the three persons of the undivided Trinity. The divine existence is really identical with the divine essence and divine goodness.¹⁶ Together with the first two ecumenical councils I profess that the *Word* is the Eternal and uncreated Son of the Eternal Father, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father, through whom all things were made and without whom nothing was made that was made (John 1:3). Together with Ephesus and Chalcedon, I do not separate Jesus and the Word into two persons but profess one and the same person who is fully God and fully human on account of his two natures.

Although, any attempt to enumerate foundational metaphysical or theological principles of the Angelic Doctor could be challenged, my hope is that the following enumeration is moderately uncontroversial. It is certainly not intended to be an exhaustive list. I do, however, judge it to be a collection of some of the most germane to the present textual debate. With respect to divine attributes, Thomas is committed to (1) divine simplicity and (2) divine immutability. In regard to God and creatures, Thomas is committed to (3) *creatio ex nihilo*,¹⁷ (4) the real distinction between God and creatures, (5) contingent predication,¹⁸ and that (6) all creatures are really dependent upon God for their existence.¹⁹

In regard to grace there is of course the foundational axiom that (7) grace perfects and presupposes but does not destroy nature.²⁰ As for the metaphysical constitution of a finite being, there is the (8) real distinction between nature and supposit and (9) the real distinction between essence and existence. Thomas affirms that (10) the supposit (or person) is the proportionate subject of the act of existence in creatures,²¹

¹⁴ Thomas, *ST IaIIae*, q. 110, a. 1c (ed. Leonina, 7: 311b).

¹⁵ Thomas, *QD de Veritate*, q. 21, a. 1, ad 4 (ed. Leonina, 22.3.1: 594b).

¹⁶ Thomas, *SCG* 1.22 (ed. Leonina, 13: 68); *ST Ia*, q. 3, a. 4c (ed. Leonina, 4: 42a).

¹⁷ Thomas, *SCG* 2.16 (ed. Leonina, 13: 299-300); *ST Ia*, q. 45, a. 1c (ed. Leonina, 4: 464b).

¹⁸ By which I mean: Whenever a contingent term is predicated of God, it implies no new, real relation of God to the creature but only implies a new, real relation of the creature to God. See, Thomas, *SCG* 2.12-14 (ed. Leonina, 13: 290-91 & 293); *Scriptum in 3 Sent.*, d. 5, q. 1, a. 1, sol. 1, ad 3, n. 27 (ed. Moos, 188); and *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 7c (ed. Leonina, 11: 40); cf. *ST Ia*, q. 13, a. 7c (ed. Leonina, 4: 153a).

¹⁹ Thomas, *SCG* 2.6 & 2.15 (ed. Leonina, 13: 281 & 295); *ST Ia*, q. 44, a. 1c (ed. Leonina, 4: 455b).

²⁰ Thomas, *ST Ia*, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2 (ed. Leonina, 4: 22b).

²¹ Thomas, *Quodl.* 9, q. 2, a. 2c (ed. Leonina, 25.1: 94.48-59); *QD de Unione Verbi Incarnati*, a. 4c (ed. Obenauer, 84).

(11) that objects are received according to the mode of the recipient,²² and that (12) a finite essence limits the act of existence which it receives.²³

The Problem with the Single-*Esse* Thomistic View

Although there is insufficient space to extrapolate a historically and textually replete example of the ‘classic’ Thomist, single-*esse* view (e.g., in Cajetan, or the Salamancans, or Garrigou-Lagrange),²⁴ what I want to be clear about here are the basic or fundamental problems with this *consensus generalis Thomistarum* as it has slowly pristinated over the course of 700 years. This view fails to sufficiently apply three principles: (1) essence limits existence, (2) divine immutability, and (3) universal ontological dependence upon the first cause. The result is that this ‘standard’ single-*esse* account is incapable of providing a metaphysically sufficient reason as to why the human nature of Christ is created.

Saying that the humanity exists by the uncreated existence of the Word is to say that it is not related to the Trinity as to an efficient cause, but every created reality is related to God as to an efficient cause,²⁵ for everything which exists in any way exists by God,²⁶ according to a limited or participated *esse*,²⁷ for a created *esse* is the proper effect of God as *ipsum esse*.²⁸ And whereas normally the proper subject of creation or generation would be the supposit, in the unparalleled case of the incarnation, the human nature is a created individual before God,

²² Thomas, *SCG* 2.50.[6] (ed. Leonina, 13: 384b); *ST* Ia, q. 75, a. 5c (ed. Leonina, 5: 202a).

²³ Thomas, *in 1 Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 2, s.c. 2 (ed. Mandonnet, 1: 197); *in 1 Sent.*, d. 8, q. 2, a. 1c (ed. Mandonnet, 1: 202); *QD de Spiritualibus Creaturis*, a. 1c (ed. Leonina, 24.2: 13b-14a); and *ST* Ia, q. 7, a. 2c (ed. Leonina, 4: 74b).

²⁴ For a fuller explication and critique, see Eric A. Mabry, ‘*Nihil Creatum*: Some Thomistic Concerns about the *Consensus Thomistarum* regarding the *esse* of Christ’, *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly* [Forthcoming].

²⁵ See Thomas, *ST* Ia, q. 8, a. 3c et ad 1 (ed. Leonina, 4: 87).

²⁶ See Thomas, *ST* Ia, q. 44, a. 1c: ‘necesse est dicere omne quod quocumque modo est, a Deo esse’ (ed. Leonina, 4: 455a).

²⁷ See Thomas, *QD de Spiritualibus Creaturis*, a. 1c: ‘Omne igitur quod est post primum ens, cum non sit suum esse, habet esse in aliquo receptum, per quod ipsum esse contrahitur: et sic in quolibet creato aliud est natura rei que participat esse et aliud ipsum esse participatum. Et cum quolibet res participet per assimilationem primum actum | in quantum habet esse, necesse est quod esse participatum in unoquoque comparetur ad naturam participantem ipsum sicut actus ad potentiam’ (ed. Leonina, 24.2: 13b-14a).

²⁸ See Thomas, *ST* Ia, q. 8, a. 1c (ed. Leonina, 4: 82a).

not existing *per se*, but in another, because it is really joined to and assumed by the person of the Son.²⁹

Naturally, the Thomist commentary tradition developed a standard reply to objections rooted in the principle of finite reception and limitation. This reply may be found in Cajetan, the Salamancans, and Garrigou-Lagrange (among others) and invokes an analogical appeal to the beatific vision as an instance where there is reception without limitation. But this analogy fails because it conflates the *ordo essendi* with the *ordo cognoscendi* by not adverting to the fact that while it may be true that the possible intellect receives intelligible species without limitation there is no reason to conclude that an individuated, finite essence or concrete nature receives *esse* without limitation. I find no evidence whatsoever, that this is a metaphysical possibility compatible with Thomas' principles or theological commitments.³⁰

The Problem with the Non-Thomistic Double-*Esse* View

There are two basic problems with the non-Thomistic double-*esse* view: (1) Metaphysical and (2) Theological. The metaphysical problem is that it denies the principle that the supposit is the proper and proportionate subject of existence. The theological problem is that in Christ, on this view, he has a second (not necessarily secondary) created *esse* because every individuated nature has its own *esse existentiae*. The metaphysical problem constitutes one of the main axis of philosophical difference between Thomists and other Scholastic Metaphysicians, such debates have proceeded for centuries and (ideally) ought to be settled metaphysically (not necessarily theologically). But if someone is making a claim about Thomas' understanding of *esse secundarium*, then, I think one must apply his principles consistently. As I have illustrated elsewhere,³¹ Thomas' metaphysics does not change in the *QD de unione*. His commitments are consistent across the *Summa contra Gentiles*, the *Quodlibetal Questions*, the *QD de Unione*, and the *Summa Theologiae*.

Consequently, according to Thomistic principles, whatever the character of the created *esse* of Christ's humanity, it cannot be natural and proper to the humanity nor can the hypostatic union said to be

²⁹ See Thomas, *QD de Unione*, a. 2c: 'Sic igitur, quia natura humana in Christo non per se separatim subsistit, sed existit in alio, id est in hypostasi Verbi Dei—non quidem sicut accidens in subiecto neque proprie sicut pars in toto, sed per ineffabilem assumptionem—, ideo humana natura in Christo potest quidem dici individuum aliquod vel particulare vel singulare, non tamen potest dici vel hypostasis vel suppositum, sicut nec persona' (ed. Obenauer, 56).

³⁰ For more on this issue see, Eric A. Mabry, 'Nihil Creatum: Some Thomistic Concerns about the *Consensus Thomistarum* regarding the *esse* of Christ', *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly* [Forthcoming].

³¹ See Mabry, 'The Hypothesis of *Esse Secundarium*', 90-94.

dependent on it, except as presupposing it *in ratione*.³² Rather the created *esse* must be understood as the contingent result of the Trinity's uniting of the human nature to the Word. This means that the *esse secundarium* is a dependent *esse* because it is a contingent *esse*. Understood as a grace (i.e., *gratia unionis*) it is absolutely supernatural, for not only is there no preceding merit, but it is also absolutely beyond the natural proportion of a created nature *to be the nature* of the Son of God.³³ A human nature does not possess a natural potency for a substantial union with a divine person. Thus, the actuation of a human nature which results from the divine uniting is the actuation of a substantial, obediencial potency.³⁴

What Sort of *Esse* is Implied by the Hypostatic Union?

The soteriological emphasis is absolutely unmistakable in the *tertia pars* of Thomas' great theological project, the *Summa Theologiae*. In the short prologue, Thomas refers to Jesus as 'savior' four times, being careful at the beginning to identify the savior with 'our Lord Jesus Christ' and at the end with 'God incarnate'. Throughout, the *telos* of salvation and immortal life is clearly in focus. The *tertia pars* is divided into three major sections: (I) the Savior, (II) Sacraments, (III) and immortal life.³⁵

The treatise on the savior is not divided thematically into Christ's person and work, although it is perhaps tempting to read it that way. Thomas' explicit division is between (A) the mystery of the incarnation and (B) 'those things done and suffered by our Savior Himself, that is, God incarnate'.³⁶ The treatise on the mystery has a threefold division: (1) the *convenientia* of the incarnation, (2) the manner of the union of the Word Incarnate (qq. 2–15), and (3) the things which follow upon this union (qq. 16–26).³⁷

³² See Suarez, *Comm. ac Disp. in IIIa*, q. 17, a. 2, disp. 36, sect. 2, n. 6: 'Ex his principiis metaphysicis demonstratur Theologica conclusio a nobis posita, quia humanitas Christi, ut condistincta a Verbo, intelligitur esse quaedam actualis entitas, quam ipsa secum affert, et illam a Verbo formaliter non recipit; ergo intelligitur esse existens per existentiam propriam et creatam, omnino a Verbo distinctam' (ed. Berton, 18: 262b).

³³ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 4, a. 1c & a. 2, ad 2 (ed. Leonina, 11: 71b & 74b).

³⁴ See Bernard Lonergan, *On the Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, trans. Michael Shields, vol. 7 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick Crowe & Robert Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) 112; *On the Incarnate Word*, trans. Charles Hefling, vol. 8 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert Doran & Jeremy Wilkins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 458.

³⁵ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, prolog. (ed. Leonina, 11: 5).

³⁶ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, prolog. (ed. Leonina, 11: 5b).

³⁷ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 1, prolog. (ed. Leonina, 11: 6a).

The text which is of immediate concern falls in (a) the first division of (2) the manner of the union. Following the *via doctrinae*, Thomas divides his discussion of (2) the manner of the union into (a) the union itself (q. 2), (b) the Person who assumes (q. 3), and (c) the nature assumed (qq. 4–15).³⁸ Consequently, question two of the *tertia pars* constitutes the discussion (2a) of the union in itself. Article seven of this question asks: ‘Is the union something created?’ Thomas has already addressed the site of the union (in a person, not a nature) (aa. 1–2), clarified the meaning of person (a. 3) and discussed some of the unique features of Christ’s incarnate person (a. 4). He has also made it clear that the union is not accidental (a. 6). This rejection of accidentality is especially worthy of mention as we move into an examination of article seven, for it is a shared feature both in Thomas’ characterization of the hypostatic union and of *esse secundarium*.

If we compare the frame of the question asked in article seven with its parallel in Thomas’ *Sentences Commentary*,³⁹ we will find that the terminology varies, for in the *Scriptum* the objections are prefaced by ‘it seems that the union is not some creature’, whereas in the *Summa* Thomas prefaced the objections with: ‘it seems that the union of divine and human nature is not something created’. This variation in terms does not necessarily signify a substantive difference in content. The addition of *aliquid*, however, should suggest something of significance, especially given the question Thomas asks of the soul in the *prima pars*, namely, whether the soul is something (*aliquid*) subsistent.⁴⁰ Given his negative answer in article six of the *tertia pars* regarding the accidentality of the union, Thomas is clearly indicating that this union occurs in a substantial order, provided that we initially understand ‘substantial’ here as ‘according to subsistence’ and not ‘according to essence or nature’.⁴¹

The *sed contras* of the *Summa* and the *Scriptum* each take as their basis the principle that what has a beginning in time is created. The bodies of the responses, however, vary significantly while in no way contradicting each other. The *Scriptum* focuses on the three foundations for a relation (quantity, quality, and action/passion) so that it may provide a way of clarifying exactly what kind of relation this union is.⁴² The response of the *Summa* invokes the principle of extrinsic, contingent predication,⁴³ a strategy it shares with the reply to objection three in the *Scriptum*. The *Summa* concludes from the principle of

³⁸ See Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, prolog. (ed. Leonina, 11: 22a).

³⁹ See Thomas, *in 3 Sent.*, d. 5, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 1 (ed. Moos, 185).

⁴⁰ See Thomas, *ST Ia*, q. 75, a. 2.

⁴¹ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 6c (ed. Leonina, 11: 37a).

⁴² Thomas, *in 3 Sent.*, d. 5, q. 1, a. 1, sol. 1, nn. 22–24 (ed. Moos, 187).

⁴³ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 7c (ed. Leonina, 11: 40); cf. *ST Ia*, q. 13, a. 7; Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, 12.15–16 (CCSL 48: 369–372).

contingent predication that since this union is really in a creature, namely, the human nature, then it is right to say that the union is something created (*quoddam creatum*). This conclusion differs only slightly from the conclusion of the *Scriptum*: ‘the union according to reality is a certain creature (*creatura quaedam*)’.⁴⁴

The first objections and replies of the *Summa* and *Scriptum* are almost identical. It is not until the second and third objections and replies that there emerges a radical shift in content. In the *Scriptum*, the content of the second objection regards the definitional principle that a union is a relation between equals. The reply to which, it should be noted, bears a curious (but inverted) resemblance to the reply to the first objection in article four of the *De Unione*.⁴⁵ Thomas, simply acquiesces to this principle in the case of a union among created things, but denies that it applies to a union between creature and Creator. The third objection in the *Scriptum* tries to employ a process of elimination in order to rule out the possibility of the union being something created (*quid creatum*) by excluding all the different ways in which something created may be predicated of God (according to cause, assumption, or likeness). Thomas responds by showing that *as predicated of God* the union is neither Creator or creature and invokes the principle of contingent predication to reorient the predication because it is founded upon a real relation of a creature (namely, the human nature) to the Creator.⁴⁶

The second objection in the *Summa* tries to show that the union is not something created (*aliquid creatum*) because the *telos* of the union is in the divine hypostasis of the Son in whom the union finds its completion.⁴⁷ Thomas counters that the ‘intelligibility (*ratio*) of a relation, as also of a motion, depends upon the end or term: but its *esse* depends upon its subject. And because such a union [as the hypostatic union] does not have its *esse* really except in the created nature (as was said), it follows that it has a created *esse*’.⁴⁸ If we are faithful to the pedagogy Thomas has led us through thus far, we can immediately rule out the possibility of this *esse creatum* being an accidental *esse*, because the union does not take place in an accidental but substantial order. In addition, according to the body of this article such an *esse creatum*

⁴⁴ Thomas, *in 3 Sent.*, d. 5, q. 1, a. 1, sol. 1, n. 24 (ed. Moos, 188).

⁴⁵ Thomas, *in 3 Sent.*, d. 5, q. 1, a. 1, sol. 1, ad 2: ‘*unio potest esse relatio aequiparantiae in rebus creatis, sed non in Creatore et creatura; quia non eodem modo se habent ad unionem*’ and *QD de Unione*, a. 4, ad 1: ‘*esse humanae naturae non est esse divinae. Nec tamen simpliciter dicendum est, quod Christus sit duo secundum esse: quia non ex aequo respicit utrumque esse suppositum aeternum*’ (ed. Obenauer, 86).

⁴⁶ Thomas, *in 3 Sent.*, d. 5, q. 1, a. 1, sol. 1, ad 3 (ed. Moos, 188).

⁴⁷ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 7c, obj. 2 (ed. Leonina, 11: 40a).

⁴⁸ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 7c, ad 2: ‘*ratio relationis, sicut et motus, dependent ex fine vel termino: sed esse eius dependet ex subiecto. Et quia unio talis non habet esse reale nisi in natura creata, ut dictum est, consequens est quod habeat esse creatum*’ (ed. Leonina, 11: 40b).

is temporal because it has a beginning in time. Both of these features (i.e., non-accidentality and temporality) are shared with Thomas' enigmatic characterization of *esse secundarium* in article four of the *QD de Unione*. This language of *esse creatum* is also something that is entirely lacking from the discussion in the *Scriptum*. If we were to regard the language of *esse secundarium* in the *De Unione* as a step in development rather than as an 'aberration', it could serve to explain why the language of *esse creatum* emerges in this question in the *Summa*, whereas it did not emerge in Thomas' discussion of the same *topos* in the *Scriptum*.

So if the hypostatic union is a substantial relation, what does it mean to speak of the *esse* of that union if we cannot be talking about the *esse* of an accidental relation? Does a substantial relation have an accidental *esse*? This seems highly unlikely. If a substantial relation has an *esse*, it must be a substantial *esse*. But if this is the case, what is the subject of the *esse creatum* in question? For a relation, strictly speaking, cannot be a subject but is *in* a subject. For this reason, Thomas deduces the character of the *esse creatum* from *the subject of the relation*, which is the human nature. Is the human nature as a finite reality capable of being the subject of a substantial relation immune from the principle that *every being is a being by participation*?⁴⁹

Are there any other examples of a created, finite, being having a substantial relation? I think there are, but the example will be a step removed and therefore analogical. Normally, only in the case of supposita do we have what must be considered to be a substantial relation, namely, the relation of *creari* between a created individual and the creator: 'creation is the production of a being' and 'all things are produced in *esse* by God', but it is redundant to speak of the creation of the relation of creation.⁵⁰

In the case of Christ, there can be no created supposit.⁵¹ Thomas regards the human nature of Christ as an *individuum* without conceding that it is a supposit.⁵² If as just indicated, the primary substantial relation of any created being (in the order of act and not in the order of potency) is that of existence itself, then in the extraordinary, unparalleled, and absolutely supernatural case of a created, individual, human nature that actually exists as joined to the second person of the Trinity, how are we to distinguish the union from the *esse* of the union? Are there two substantial relations? Is the status of *actually existing* as inhering in the individual human nature of Christ really distinct from what we call the hypostatic union?

⁴⁹ Thomas, *SCG* 2.15.[5] (ed. Leonina, 13: 295b).

⁵⁰ Thomas, *SCG* 2.18.[4] (ed. Leonina, 13: 305b).

⁵¹ Thomas, *ST ST* IIIa, q. 16, aa. 10-12 (ed. Leonina, 11: 214-18).

⁵² Thomas, *QD De Unione*, a. 2c (ed. Obenauer, 56).

What is happening, here, is the convergence of two different ways of talking about the very same substantial relation. A distinction is, therefore, necessary: The union (as a relation) receives its designation ‘hypostatic’ from the term of the union, namely, the person of the Word, whereas the *esse creatum* receives its designation from the subject of the relation, namely, the human nature. The *esse*, therefore, would be the *esse* of a nature not a supposit and as with all other created individuals this nature would exist *per participationem*, but not as in a similitude or likeness but as joined uniquely and supernaturally to the Person of the Word.

A brief note should be added about the reply to objection three. This objection argues that since the man [Jesus] is said to be Creator on account of the union, how much more so should the union be regarded not as something created but as the Creator.⁵³ Thomas concedes that the man is called even God on account of the union, but he corrects the inference drawn by pointing out that this is so because the union finds its completion or term in the divine hypostasis. There is no reason to conclude from this that the union is itself the Creator or God. He then goes on to add that whenever something (*aliquid*) is said to be created, this more regards its *esse* than the relation.⁵⁴ Such a reply in no way abrogates Thomas’ characterization of this union as a ‘certain relation’ in the body of the response. But I do believe that it suggests a shift in focus in this article in the *Summa* from that of the *Scriptum*.

A relation is between two terms, and when there is a relation between created and uncreated terms, there is going to be an acute ambiguity about the implications of that relation for the uncreated term. This problematic is clearly in focus in the *Scriptum*, but the emphasis is on trying to parse the kind of relation that this union denotes. What comes to take precedence in the body of the response in the *Summa*, however, is the deployment of the rule for extrinsic, contingent predication, which immediately clarifies the issue of relations obtaining between created and divine terms. This rule serves as the backdrop for all the replies to objections in the *Scriptum*, but in the *Summa* Thomas opts for answers that deepen this established understanding through explicit recourse to metaphysical principles regarding existence.

What Sort of Grace is Implied by the Hypostatic Union? Is It Created or Uncreated?

Appealing to another frame of reference, Thomas asks whether the union of the incarnation takes place through grace? He invokes the

⁵³ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 7, obj. 3 (ed. Leonina, 11: 40a).

⁵⁴ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 7, ad 3 (ed. Leonina, 11: 40b).

twofold distinction he advanced in the *prima secundae*,⁵⁵ namely, between grace considered (1) as the very will of God freely giving something and (2) as the very gratuitous gift of God.⁵⁶ Thomas accords causal primacy to the will of God (God as the giver of all good things), for human nature is in need of this gratuitous, divine will in order for it to be elevated unto God. Such elevation exceeds the capacity of human nature.⁵⁷ The divine initiative, then, is absolutely prior and constitutes the sole condition of possibility for the elevation of human nature.

This elevation may also be considered as concretely received in the human nature, that is, as *given*. This leads Thomas to distinguish two ways in which human nature is elevated unto God: (2a) ‘through operation, by which the saints know and love God’ and (2b) ‘by personal existence, which mode is unique to Christ’.⁵⁸ Thomas further distinguishes these elevations by noting that the perfection of an operation requires that its power be perfected through a habit, whereas a nature may have existence in its own supposit without some mediating habit.⁵⁹

Turning, then, to apply these three distinctions to the question at hand, Thomas concedes that both the union of the incarnation and the union of the saints to God by knowledge and love occur by grace (1) understood as the will of God. But the very fact that the human nature is united to the divine person, may be called a grace (2) in the sense of gift only insofar as this takes place due to no preceding merit; it may not be called a grace in the sense of gift, if by this is meant a habitual gift by the mediation of which the union of the incarnation takes place. The union of the incarnation is not a mediating habit, nor does it take place by a mediating habit.⁶⁰

Such a distinction (between two different senses of grace as gift) really constitutes the pinnacle of Thomas’ analysis of the union of the incarnation in question two, for the next article (a. 11) addresses his comment about ‘no preceding merit’ and the final article can now pose a question with a ‘new’ technical term, whether *the grace of union* was

⁵⁵ See Thomas, *ST IaIIae*, q. 110, a. 1c (ed. Leonina, 7: 311).

⁵⁶ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 10c: ‘gratia dupliciter dicitur: uno modo, ipsa voluntas Dei gratis aliquid dantis; alio modo, ipsum gratuitum donum Dei’ (ed. Leonina, 11: 48a).

⁵⁷ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 10c (ed. Leonina, 11: 48a).

⁵⁸ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 10c (ed. Leonina, 11: 48).

⁵⁹ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 10c (ed. Leonina, 11: 48b).

⁶⁰ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 10c (ed. Leonina, 11: 48b). In the *Scriptum*, Thomas identifies various interpretations of the phrase *gratia unionis* (see *Scriptum in 3 Sent.*, d. 13, q. 3, a. 1, n. 121). The hypostatic union, therefore, is one among many competing meanings for *gratia unionis* presented in the *Scriptum*. In the *Summa*, however, Thomas only identifies the *gratia unionis* with the hypostatic union (see for example, *ST 3a.7.13c*). The other meanings receive no mention at all. The need for their presentation has been made obsolete because of the metaphysical principle invoked, namely, that no nature has *esse* in its supposit by the mediation of a habit and the analogous, theological principle which follows from this *ex convenientia* that no habitual grace mediates the union between Christ’s human nature and his divine person.

natural to the man Christ? The solution to which, Thomas already has ample principles at his disposal.⁶¹

We find that this distinction between the ‘grace of union’ and ‘habitual grace’ emerges again in article six of question six in what could be counted as a kind-of parallel text to the above (keeping in mind Thomas’ distinction between union and assumption),⁶² insofar as it inquires into whether the human nature is assumed by a mediating grace. In the body of his response, Thomas immediately posits the distinction between *gratia unionis* and *gratia habituale*, but he also excludes the possibility of either grace acting as a medium in the assumption: ‘for the grace of union is the very personal existence which is freely and divinely given to the human nature in the person of the Word, which indeed is the term of the assumption. But the habitual grace, which pertains to the special sanctity of that man is an effect consequent upon the union...’⁶³

Habitual grace, then, is excluded as a medium for the assumption because it is an effect of the union—it does not precede the union.⁶⁴ It is also excluded because the union does not take place according to an accident but according to subsistence;⁶⁵ habitual grace, however, is an accident and constitutes an accidental perfection of the soul;⁶⁶ thus, it cannot be a medium for the assumption. Thomas indicates that the union of the human nature to the Word of God takes place according to the personal *esse* of the Word, and as we have just seen Thomas identifies the *gratia unionis* with the personal *esse* of the Word *as given*. But the personal *esse* considered as the *gratia unionis* does not act as a medium ‘because it does not depend upon some habit, but immediately upon the nature itself’.⁶⁷ This is reminiscent of Thomas’ earlier observation that a nature has its *esse* in its own supposit apart from the mediation of some habit.⁶⁸ Consequently, if the Word has communicated his own *esse* to the human nature, that is, if he has united the human nature to himself in his person, then there is no ‘buffer’, as it were, between the human nature and the divine person of the Word. It is simply a matter of denoting the new relation that accrues to the

⁶¹ Thomas deals with this question quickly through an advertence to some of the meanings of ‘nature’ which he has already delineated in article one of question two.

⁶² Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 8c (ed. Leonina, 11: 42).

⁶³ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 6, a. 6c: ‘Gratia enim unionis est ipsum esse personale quod gratis divinitus datur humanae naturae in persona Verbi: quod quidem est terminus assumptionis’ (ed. Leonina, 11: 104).

⁶⁴ See Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 7, a. 13, ad 2 (ed. Leonina, 11: 125b). NB: this is not a temporal precedence, see *ST IIIa*, q. 7, a. 13c (ed. Leonina, 11: 124b).

⁶⁵ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 6, a. 6, s.c. (ed. Leonina, 11: 104a).

⁶⁶ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 6, a. 6, ad 2 (ed. Leonina, 11: 104b).

⁶⁷ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 6, a. 6, ad 1 (ed. Leonina, 11: 104b).

⁶⁸ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 10c (ed. Leonina, 11: 48b).

human nature insofar as it has been brought into communion with the divine *esse* of the Son.

We should examine more closely, however, the rather extraordinary claim that the *gratia unionis* is the very personal *esse* that is freely and divinely given to the human nature in the person of the Word. The text does not permit us to read this as if Thomas were saying that the *gratia unionis* is the divine being itself (without qualification), for he is clearly recapitulating the distinction he made above,⁶⁹ between *gratia* understood as a created *donum* and *gratia* understood as the uncreated Divine Will itself.⁷⁰ In order to avoid the pain of contradiction, Thomas must be thinking of the human nature as *participating* somehow in the personal *esse* of the Word. Such participation would be a *donum creatum*, which he designates with the term *gratia unionis*. This is what it means to say that the divine *esse* is freely and divinely given to the human nature in the person of the Word.

It is important at this stage to recall that *gratia unionis* is not something over and above the union itself, for Thomas explicitly identifies the *gratia unionis* with the union.⁷¹ If this is further integrated with Thomas' claim that the union is an *esse creatum*, then, we are presented with a problematic not between the language of the *QD de Unione* and the *Summa Theologiae* but with a problematic that arises within the text of the *Summa* itself: how can the personal *esse* of the Word be an *esse creatum*? Strictly speaking, it cannot. But as given or communicated to the human nature, the relation that accrues *as a result* to the human nature may be understood as the actuation of a substantial, obediential potency and, therefore, characterized as a created, supernatural, substantial, participation of the human nature in the divine *esse* of the Son. This is the only way to make sense of this passage in the *Summa* without attributing some inconsistency or contradiction to Thomas. If the grace of union is created or understood as identical with the hypostatic union as something created, then it cannot be identical with the uncreated divine *esse*. This would violate the real distinction between God and creatures. The internal pedagogy of the text only permits the grace of union to be identified with the personal *esse* of the Word *insofar* as it is 'freely and divinely *given to* the human nature *in* the person of the Word'. Which is to say, that the grace of union considered as a created *esse* can only be identified with the uncreated personal *esse* according to participation and not *simpliciter*.

⁶⁹ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 10c (ed. Leonina, 11: 48b); cf. IaIIae, q. 110, a. 1c (ed. Leonina, 7: 311).

⁷⁰ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 6, a. 6c (ed. Leonina, 11: 104b).

⁷¹ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 7, a. 13c (ed. Leonina, 11: 124b).

Could the Union Be Considered as a Created, Supernatural, Substantial Participation?

At the end of question seven in the *tertia pars*, Thomas compares the habitual grace in Christ with the grace of union. This leads him to a comparison of the missions of the Spirit and Son whereby he associates habitual grace and charity with the mission of the Holy Spirit and the personal union or assumption with the mission of the Son.⁷² This opens up an illuminating analogy, for if sanctifying grace and charity are to the Spirit what the *gratia unionis* is to the Son, then a reflection on the way Thomas characterizes charity may help us to better articulate the meaning of *gratia unionis*.

When asking whether charity is something created in the soul, the first objection Thomas entertains bases its claim on two Augustinian texts from which it draws the conclusion that ‘charity is not something created in the soul but is God himself’.⁷³ Thomas concedes the basic principle of divine simplicity invoked by the objector, namely, that the divine essence is itself charity, as also wisdom and goodness and grants that we are indeed said to be good by the goodness which God is and wise by the wisdom which God is. But Thomas adds that the reason for this is because the goodness by which we are formally good is a certain participation of divine goodness and the wisdom by which we are formally wise is a certain participation of divine wisdom. Consequently, the charity by which we formally love our neighbor is a certain participation of divine charity.⁷⁴ Although he does not make the distinction explicit until his reply to objection two,⁷⁵ nevertheless, Thomas is distinguishing between the divine charity identical with the divine essence as efficient cause and charity as the created participation of divine love as formal cause.

Elsewhere, Thomas deepens his analysis of this participation in divine love, when he asks whether charity is caused in us by infusion. Charity is founded upon the communication of eternal beatitude and since this communication is not according to natural goods but according to gratuitous gifts, such charity exceeds the capacity of nature.⁷⁶ Consequently, charity is neither something naturally occurring in us nor can it be acquired through natural powers. Thus, it can only come through the infusion of the Holy Spirit, ‘which is the love of the Father and the Son, whose participation in us is created charity itself’.⁷⁷ Here, we see that Thomas characterizes the charity in us as created and

⁷² Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 7, a. 13c (ed. Leonina, 11: 124b).

⁷³ Thomas, *ST IIaIIae*, q. 23, a. 2, obj. 1 (ed. Leonina, 8: 164a).

⁷⁴ Thomas, *ST IIaIIae*, q. 23, a. 2, ad 1 (ed. Leonina, 8: 165b).

⁷⁵ Thomas, *ST IIaIIae*, q. 23, a. 2, ad 2 (ed. Leonina, 8: 165b).

⁷⁶ Thomas *ST IIaIIae*, q. 24, a. 2c (ed. Leonina, 8: 175a).

⁷⁷ Thomas *ST IIaIIae*, q. 24, a. 2c (ed. Leonina, 8: 175b).

identifies this participation with the Holy Spirit. Thus, charity is a created participation in the supernatural communication of the Holy Spirit.

Because of the analogy of the missions, we may suggest this language of participation to explicate the *gratia unionis*: the union of the human nature to the Person of the Word is the created participation of the human nature in the uncreated communication of the personal *esse* of the Son. We may add to this the requisite qualifications that the created participation of the human nature is substantial (not accidental) and a relation (not a habit), which may in no way be construed as a medium or ‘buffer’ between Christ’s humanity and divinity. This union expresses the real, substantial relation of the human nature to the Incarnate Word.

Dubia

There remain some further issues that merit some attention. First, if *esse secundarium* is the substantial, created, and absolutely supernatural participation of the Word’s humanity in his divine *esse*, then why doesn’t Thomas use the language of participation to describe *esse secundarium*, hypostatic union, or the grace of union? Second, what are we to make of Thomas’ remark in the *Tertia Pars* that the eternal existence of the Son of God *becomes* the existence of the man?⁷⁸ Third, something must be said about the possibility of Nestorianism or a two-person Christology. And lastly, a pressing question about causality must be examined.

(1) I believe we will find a clue to the first in Thomas’ *Lectura super Ioannem*, for there Thomas notes that the grace of union (which is not a habitual grace) is a *gratuitum donum*, given to Christ, so that in the human nature he is the true Son of God, not by participation, but by nature, inasmuch as the human nature of Christ is united to the Son of God in person.⁷⁹

This observation of Thomas illuminates the interpretation proposed for *esse secundarium* in a number of important ways. First, it explicitly designates the *gratia unionis* with the term *gratuitum donum*, which we noted above in our discussion of the *Summa* is Thomas’ term for a created grace. Second, Thomas again very clearly characterizes the hypostatic union as a grace. Lastly, while it may be tempting to read this passage as counter to our interpretation insofar as it seems to reject the language of participation, nevertheless, the meaning and intention of this text constitutes no such refutation.

⁷⁸ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 17, a. 2, ad 2 (ed. Leonina, 11: 222b).

⁷⁹ Thomas, *Lect. super Ioan.*, c. 3, lect. 6, n. 544 (ed. Aquinas Institute, 205).

It is important to recall that filiation is something principally said of the person not nature.⁸⁰ Hence, divine filiation is a feature of the Word's divine personhood; it is not an effect either of the human or divine nature but is what is proper to his own unique divine supposit. And when Thomas notes that Christ is the true Son of God in the human nature *not by participation but by nature*, the 'by nature' is referring to the divine nature insofar as it is really identical with the divine person of the Word.

So the question of participation in this text really regards the person, and consequently Thomas has some version of Adoptionism in mind. But my argument about the meaning of *esse secundarium* in no way suggests that the person of Christ is divine by participation, but rather that the human nature participates in the divine *esse*. Christ the Word as a divine person does not participate in the divine *esse* but is the very divine *esse*. The same may be said of the Word as is said of the Father or the Spirit: He is *ipsum esse subsistens*. He has existence absolutely, totally, and perfectly—not according to participation. The human nature of Christ cannot be a Son because it is not a person, it is brought into union with the Person of the Son but it is not identical with the Son any more than it is identical with the divine nature.⁸¹

The spectre of adoptionism with respect to Christ's person may have made Thomas reticent to use the term participation in other Christological contexts, especially those surrounding the hypostatic union. But the absence of a term does not necessarily imply an absence of meaning. Consequently, I have argued that the term participation best expresses the meaning Thomas sought to convey in the texts we have examined above, even if for rhetorical reasons he chose not to employ the term himself.

(2) As to the second issue, many have found justification for maintaining that there is no real distinction between the divine *esse* and the *esse secundarium* in Thomas' remark that 'the eternal *esse* of the Son of God, which is the divine nature, becomes the *esse* of the man, inasmuch as the human nature is assumed by the Son of God into the unity of person'.⁸² Can this statement be reconciled with an interpretation arguing for *esse secundarium* as a created, supernatural, substantial participation?

Clearly, this text cannot be understood as some kind of transmutation, a kind-of existential monophysitism. The divine *esse* cannot become a human *esse* anymore than the divine nature can become a

⁸⁰ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 23, a. 4c (ed. Leonina, 11: 267a); *Quodl.* 9, q. 2, a. 3c (ed. Leonina, 25.1: 96b-97a).

⁸¹ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 24, a. 1, ad 2 (ed. Leonina, 11: 269b).

⁸² Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 17, a. 2, ad 2: 'illud esse aeternum Filii Dei quod est divina natura, fit esse hominis, in quantum humana natura assumitur a Filio Dei in unitate personae' (ed. Leonina, 11: 222b).

human nature. But it also does not seem open to the interpretation that the divine *esse* stands-in, as it were, for what would otherwise be the *esse hominis*. There are a number of problems with such an interpretation, especially for one who is arguing that the position in the *De Unione* is compatible with that articulated in the *Summa* and other texts. In the reply to the first objection of the *De Unione*, Thomas says that the ‘*esse* of the human nature is not the *esse* of the divine’.⁸³

This cannot be understood as a mental or notional distinction, for as the objection itself notes: ‘existence is not said univocally of God and creatures’.⁸⁴ A mental distinction is simply insufficient to denote the real distinction that must obtain between a creaturely *esse* and the divine *esse*. One must also be careful not to read too much into the ‘becomes’ (*fit*). Thomas says elsewhere that the soul of Christ ‘becomes divine’ but adds ‘by participation’.⁸⁵ To be sure, this qualifier is not present in the text referring to Christ’s *esse*, but is it necessary? Why should we regard the ‘becomes’ as suggesting anything more than what it does in the text regarding Christ’s soul?

When an individual essence receives *esse*, it limits and determines that *esse*.⁸⁶ Despite the claim of some,⁸⁷ this can in no way happen with respect to the divine *esse*.⁸⁸ It cannot be determined, limited, or formed by any finite and created essence. The divine *esse* or subsistence may be communicated to a creature but the communication entails only a real change on the side of the creature; there is no real change in God, for God as *ipsum et summum bonum* is of himself always and eternally self-communicating. The communing creature is said to now *participate* in the creator either according to habitual (i.e., sanctifying) grace or according to personal *esse*. The participation is created and is the real change in the creature as the contingent but supernatural result of the eternal and unchanging divine communication.

The analogy of the missions that I appealed to above can again provide a helpful clarification. Just as there is a real distinction between the Holy Spirit and charity as a supernatural, created, operative habit in

⁸³ Thomas, *QD de Unione*, a. 4, ad 1: ‘esse humanae naturae non est esse divinae. Nec tamen simpliciter dicendum est, quod Christus sit duo secundum esse: quia non ex aequo respicit utrumque esse suppositum aeternum’ (ed. Obenauer, 86).

⁸⁴ Thomas, *QD de Unione*, a. 4, arg. 1 (ed. Obenauer, 84).

⁸⁵ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 7, a. 1, ad 1: ‘Sed quia cum unitate personae remanet distinctio naturarum, ut ex supra dictis patet, anima Christi non est per suam essentiam divina. Unde oportet quod fiat divina per participationem, quae est secundum gratiam’ (ed. Leonina, 11: 107a).

⁸⁶ Thomas, *in I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 2, s.c. 2 (ed. Mandonnet, 1: 197); *in I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 2, a. 1c (ed. Mandonnet, 1: 202); *QD de Spiritualibus Creaturis*, a. 1c (ed. Leonina, 24.2: 13b-14a); and *ST Ia*, q. 7, a. 2c (ed. Leonina, 4: 74b).

⁸⁷ Corey L. Barnes, ‘Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas on Person, Hypostasis, and Hypostatic Union’, *The Thomist* 72 (2008): 144. See also, Mabry, ‘The Hypothesis of *Esse Secundarium*’, 100, n. 49.

⁸⁸ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 3, a. 7c (ed. Leonina, 11: 68a).

the will of a sanctified human person, so too is there a real distinction between the divine, personal *esse* of the Word and the *esse secundarium* as a supernatural, created, substantial act in the human nature of Jesus. Such a position is simply a reiteration of the more basic and fundamental thesis on the real distinction between God and creatures. Of the very little that Thomas affirms of *esse secundarium*, it is clear that he regards it as temporal. Temporality implies both contingency and creaturehood. The *esse secundarium* is the formal, contingent and created term *ad extra* that results from the divine will to communicate the personal *esse* of the Son, but a created and contingent term is in no way really identical with its divine cause.

(3) Would an *esse secundarium* commit Thomas to a two-supposit or two-person Christology? I believe that the answer to this lies in a brief review of Thomas' mereology. A nature is related to the *esse* of its supposit as an *id quo* not an *id quod*. The supposit is *that which* has *esse* and a nature is that *by which* a supposit has *esse*.⁸⁹ Which is to say that a nature is always a part and a supposit is always a whole.⁹⁰ Nothing can abrogate this basic, metaphysical designation. Consequently, even in the *sui generis* case of the incarnation, Christ's human nature never has the status of a whole; it remains an integral part and while contributing essentially insofar as it is that by which Christ is a member of the human species, nevertheless, it does not contribute existentially. Thus, arguing that the human nature's substantial participation in the divine *esse* is rightly called an *esse secundarium* in no way changes its status as an integral, metaphysical part.

A nature cannot become a supposit. Hence, in the absolutely unparalleled, supernatural instance of the incarnation, Christ's human nature cannot be a supposit. But because it is created, we have a unique case where the human nature has an *esse* distinct from the principal *esse* of its supposit, because the supposit is uncreated, eternal, and divine whereas the human nature is created and temporal. There is a real distinction between God and every creature. But this real distinction also always entails a relation of real dependence. In the case of Christ's human nature we have a created *individuum* that as a part and as an *id quo* is not a supposit, but nevertheless participates uniquely in the personal *esse* of the Word, and consequently this participation is rightly called an *esse secundarium*.

(4) Finally, there is a problem regarding causality: If *esse secundarium* and hypostatic union although distinct *in mente*, are nevertheless the same *in re*, how can one and the same real relation have both an efficient and formal intelligibility? Put another way, if the hypostatic union is what formally relates the human nature to the Word and only

⁸⁹ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 17, a. 2c (ed. Leonina, 11: 222a); cf. IIIa, q. 35, a. 1c.

⁹⁰ Thomas, *Compendium Theologiae*, c. 211: (ed. Leonina, 42: 163b.6-7, 164b.92-93).

to the Word (and not to the Father or the Holy Spirit), but *esse secundarium* expresses the real, substantial relation of the human nature to the Creator as to its efficient cause, then how can one and the same relation relate its subject both efficiently (i.e., to all three members of the Trinity equally) and formally to only one of the three persons, namely, the Word?

It is not uncommon for one and the same relation to bear multiple intelligibilities. I made an analogical appeal to the habit of charity above, and it is possible to do so again, here. Charity is a perfection of the soul, or perhaps more strictly a perfection of a power of the soul, namely, the will. Thomas notes that God is the life of the soul ‘effectively’ through charity, yet charity is the life of the soul formally.⁹¹ This seems to suggest that although charity is strictly speaking a participation in the procession of the Holy Spirit,⁹² and this is its formal intelligibility, nevertheless, the whole Trinity causes charity and the life of the soul through charity, efficiently. There is no need to multiply charities due to distinct but related formal and efficient intelligibilities, rather the single habit of charity as ‘a new mode of indwelling’ is capable of expressing multiple kinds of intelligibilities that obtain between God and the human recipients of his love.

Likewise, ‘by one and the same act’, God ‘wills himself and other things: but his relation to himself is necessary and natural; but his relation to other things is according to a certain fittingness...’.⁹³ There are not two acts: one by which God wills himself and another by which he wills creation. Rather, there are two intelligibilities or relations (*habitudines*) of one and the same act; one that is necessary and the other which is not.

These same principles may be analogically extended to the created, substantial, supernatural relation of the human nature to the Word. The dogmatic term ‘hypostatic union’ enables us to denote the intelligibility which sets this union apart from unions between natures and thereby gives us a term whereby we may express why the human nature is only joined to the Word and consequently pertains to him alone as his own (and not to the Father or the Holy Spirit). But since we must acknowledge that all three members of the Trinity are equally the efficient cause of such a union, *esse secundarium* gives us a distinct ontological term

⁹¹ Thomas, *ST IIaIIae*, q. 23, a. 2, ad 2: ‘Deus est vita effective et animae per caritatem et corporis per animam: sed formaliter caritas est vita animae, sicut et anima corporis. Unde per hoc potest concludi quod sicut anima immediate unitur corpori, ita caritas animae’ (ed. Leonina, 8: 165b).

⁹² Thomas *ST IIaIIae*, q. 24, a. 2c (ed. Leonina, 8: 175b).

⁹³ Thomas, *SCG* 1.82.[9]: ‘Voluntas namque sua uno et eodem actu vult se et alia: sed habitudo eius ad se est necessaria et naturalis; habitudo autem eius ad alia est secundum convenientiam quandam, non quidem necessaria et naturalis, neque violenta aut innaturalis, sed voluntaria. . .’ (ed. Leonina, 13: 228b).

whereby we may denote the intelligibility of Christ's human nature insofar as it is related to the whole Trinity as to its efficient cause.

It is not supernatural that a nature has *esse* in its own supposit,⁹⁴ but it would be supernatural if the *esse* which a nature has in its own supposit is distinct from the *esse* of its supposit. In the incarnation, this must be the case because there is a real distinction between God and creatures and therefore a real distinction between the *esse* of any creature and the *esse* of God. Furthermore, no created and finite essence can receive an uncreated and infinite *esse* in an unrestricted and unlimited way, that is, every created being (whether an *id quo* or *id quod*) exists by participation not *per se*. In the unique and absolutely unparalleled case of the incarnation of the Son of God, the participation of his humanity in his personal, divine *esse* is his *esse secundarium* insofar as he temporally became man.

What Sort of New Relation is Implied by the Hypostatic Union?

Penultimately, I want to explicate one brief application of Thomas' missiology. As I have already suggested above, one of the places the notion of *esse secundarium* resurfaces in the *Summa Theologiae* is in Thomas' explication of the creaturely *esse* of the hypostatic union. But this new feature of an old question offers a more differentiated nexus if it is thought of in light of Thomas' characterization of a divine mission in question forty-three of the *prima pars*. Thomas concludes his initial discussion of the intelligibility of a divine mission as follows: 'A mission, therefore, can be fittingly ascribed to a divine person, insofar as on the one hand it implies a procession of origin from a sender; and insofar as it implies on the other a new mode of existing in something (*novum modum existendi in aliquo*)'.⁹⁵

In question seventeen of the *tertia pars*, there is again an invocation of a *novum*, but here it is a *nova habitudo*, a 'new relation of the personal pre-existent existence to the human nature'.⁹⁶ Now in predications where the mixed relation of God and creatures is implied, we have to apply the principle of contingent predication. Hence, just as Thomas notes that when it is said that God is united to the creature, we

⁹⁴ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 10c (ed. Leonina, 11: 48b).

⁹⁵ Thomas, *ST Ia*, q. 43, a. 1c: 'Missio igitur divinae Personae convenire potest, secundum quod importat ex una parte processionem originis a mittente; et secundum quod importat ex alia parte novum modum existendi in aliquo' (ed. Leonina, 4: 445b).

⁹⁶ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 17, a. 2c: 'Sic igitur, cum humana natura coniungatur Filio Dei hypostatice vel personaliter, ut supra dictum est, et non accidentaliter, consequens est quod secundum humanam naturam non adveniat sibi novum esse personale, sed solum nova habitudo esse personalis praeexistentis ad naturam humanam: ut scilicet persona illa iam dicatur subsistere, non solum secundum naturam divinam, sed etiam humanam' (ed. Leonina, 11: 222b).

must understand by this that what we really mean is that the creature is united to God (without any change in God),⁹⁷ so too, in this text what Thomas means is that there is a new relation of the human nature to the personal pre-existent existence of the Word, this new relation is not a new personal *esse*, for that would violate divine simplicity, but rather it is a new mode of existing that has as its proper ontological subject the human nature of Jesus. But since the existence of the human nature cannot be the existence of the divine nature,⁹⁸ as the principle for the real distinction between God and creatures demands, we must say that the incarnation or mission of the Word implies a formal, contingent term, which as a substantial and created grace is the *esse secundarium* of the incarnate person of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Peroratio

I have sought above to establish the thesis that *esse secundarium* denotes a created, substantial, and absolutely supernatural participation of Christ's human nature in the uncreated communication of the divine, personal *esse* of the Son of God. I have also argued that the *esse secundarium* of the *QD de Unione* indicates an aspect of the very same relation denoted dogmatically by the term 'hypostatic union' but expresses this relation within an ontological frame. Thus, we may understand *esse secundarium* as a created, supernatural, substantial participation of the human nature in the uncreated, personal *esse* of the Word.

I have illustrated this connection by looking at the way Thomas talks about the union in the *Summa* as a non-accidental but still temporal *esse creatum* and the way in which he comes to designate the union with the term *gratia unionis* that he in turn identifies with the personal *esse* of the Son as given to the human nature, that is, insofar as there is a *donum creatum* received by the human nature, which is its unmerited, supernatural, substantial participation in the personal *esse* of the Son. This created, supernatural, substantial participation is really distinct from the divine *esse* of the Son, but it remains true to say that the personal *esse* of the Son is given to the human nature of Jesus just as we also say that the Holy Spirit as proceeding love is given to an individual believer even though the created habit of charity is really distinct from the Holy Spirit.

Thus, these three terms: (1) hypostatic union, (2) *gratia unionis*, and (3) *esse secundarium* all seek to indicate and express aspects of

⁹⁷ Thomas, *ST IIIa*, q. 2, a. 7, ad 1: 'dicitur enim Deus unitus creaturae ex hoc quod creatura unita est ei, absque Dei mutatione' (ed. Leonina, 11: 40b).

⁹⁸ Thomas, *QD de Unione*, a. 4, ad 1: '... esse humanae naturae non est esse divinae. Nec tamen simpliciter dicendum est, quod Christus sit duo secundum esse: quia non ex aequo respicit utrumque esse suppositum aeternum' (ed. Obenauer, 86).

the very same supernatural event: the union between humanity and divinity, accomplished in the person of Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, become incarnate for us and for our salvation.

I began with Erich Przywara's insightful observation that 'the mystery of the supernatural incarnation reaches its critical climax in the question concerning the being of Christ'.⁹⁹ John Betz has recently issued a sort-of metaphysical *vade mecum*,¹⁰⁰ in the form of a *respondeo* to the challenges leveled by Martin Heidegger and some of his heirs. Betz begins by suggesting that we hold fast to the principle 'that metaphysics is not a univocal, one-size-fits-all term that is convenient for facile denunciations, but admits of a wide range of possibilities'.¹⁰¹ He insists against its detractors (both past and present) that the definition of metaphysics as onto-theology so frequently repeated and cited is in fact nothing other than a caricature of the Catholic metaphysical tradition: 'For what the best of the Catholic metaphysical tradition means by metaphysics is not a closed system in which God figures as the intelligible capstone of the universe... but precisely the meta-physical going beyond every such system to the God who is not only beyond all beings, but also beyond all thought...'.¹⁰²

Among the many things that Thomas' understanding of the *esse secundarium* simultaneously both safeguards and manifests is Betz and Przywara's assent to the truth that 'the abyss separating God from creaturely being can be crossed only by grace'.¹⁰³ Only an *esse secundarium* that is absolutely supernatural can adequately verify and express the radical ontological dependency of all created realities upon God: the human nature of Christ can be no exception, instead it must be the sacred site of the deepest instantiation because also the most luminous illustration of the real distinction between God and creatures, even as it is also suspended according to the most perfect and unprecedented union to the Word of the Father.

If Betz's commendation of Przywara's metaphysical proposal is implemented, then any future theology that understands itself as an

⁹⁹ See Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 1.2.7: 304.

¹⁰⁰ John Betz, 'After Heidegger and Marion: The Task of Christian Metaphysics Today', *Modern Theology* 34.4 (2018): 565-597. Three potentially fruitful points of intersection with Betz's proposal may be found in Neil Ormerod's 'Bernard Lonergan and the Recovery of a Metaphysical Frame', *Theological Studies* 74.4 (2013): 960-982; Marilyn McCord Adams' account of the role (and recovery) of metaphysics within Christology in her 'Recovering the Metaphysics: Christ as God-man, metaphysically construed', in *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 108-143; and David Bentley Hart's 'The Destiny of Christian Metaphysics: Reflections on the *Analogia Entis*', in the *Hidden and the Manifest: Essays in Theology and Metaphysics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2017), 97-112.

¹⁰¹ Betz, 'The Task of Christian Metaphysics Today', 568.

¹⁰² Betz, 'The Task of Christian Metaphysics Today', 592.

¹⁰³ Betz, 'The Task of Christian Metaphysics Today', 593.

explicitly Christological enterprise cannot dispense with a pilgrimatic respite at the site of *esse secundarium*.¹⁰⁴ I believe that *esse secundarium* will someday come to constitute a significant *locus* of systematic, theological discourse. It is my humble desire that my *ressourcement* of this term's meaning in this article will make some contribution to a *principium*, even if in the end it must be met with a *sed contra*. For *esse secundarium* means, concretely, that everything which takes place according to the human nature takes place under the horizon of this supernatural and substantial, created participation. Christ's human life can unfold historically according to this created participation in the personal *esse* of the Son but only on account of the divine initiative of joining a human nature to the Person of the Word. Hence, *esse secundarium* is not only temporal because it has a beginning in time but also because it perdures through time. *Esse secundarium* provides us with a metaphysical foundation for affirming the genuine historicity of Christ's human and temporal life.

Eric A. Mabry
University of St. Thomas (Houston, TX)

mabrye@stthom.edu

¹⁰⁴ See Betz, 'The Task of Christian Metaphysics Today', 594: '... theological metaphysics follows the stupefying, downward, kenotic movement of love, until it finds in the humility of Christ, and not in the imagined Absolute of philosophical metaphysics, the pleroma of the ever greater God. ...'.